



# U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of the Secretary

Press Service



RELEASED FOR PUBLICATION, FRIDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 21, 1923.

## BIOLOGICAL SURVEY'S WORK IMPORTANT TO WILD LIFE

Protection of useful and harmless forms of wild life and control of injurious species are two of the principal activities of the Bureau of Biological Survey. In the annual report to the Secretary of Agriculture made by the head of this branch of the department the details of the apparently conflicting efforts to conserve and destroy emphasize the importance of wild animals and birds to our economic welfare. The Biological Survey carries on a continuous campaign against predatory animals and destructive rodents, protects certain birds and animals which are in danger of being killed off too rapidly, studies the food habits of birds and animals, and makes other wild life investigations, both economic and biological.

In the recent report it is shown that the efforts to control wolves, coyotes, and rodents have met with a good measure of success. Prairie dogs have been eliminated from considerable areas, and the numbers of large wolves have been so greatly reduced in the West that it is thought the end of their raids is in sight. More than a dozen States have given their hearty support to this work and last year made total cooperative appropriations of \$647,000.

### Fight Waged Against Pests.

Poison baits have been successfully developed for use against both predatory animals and rodents. In the West, prairie dogs and ground squirrels are found on many millions of acres and cause great losses through destruction of crops and

forage. States, counties, and private organizations have cooperated with the Department of Agriculture in organized campaigns for reducing the numbers of these pests on many millions of acres. Campaigns were carried on against pocket gophers, jack rabbits, and house rats and mice, and investigations were made to improve baits and methods for combating woodchucks. Antirrat campaigns have been conducted extensively and successfully in various parts of the country.

Fur farming has come to be an important factor in keeping up the supply of fur, and the Biological Survey has been giving attention to the various problems of the industry at its experimental fur farm in New York State and elsewhere in the United States, Canada, and Alaska.

The study of the food habits of birds, principally through the examination of the contents of stomachs, is providing new facts each year concerning many species. Birds which destroy crops must be controlled, and the department has been working out plans for combating a number of species which become pests locally. Methods of poisoning pinyon jays, which are destructive of crops in Colorado, have been devised and found effective during the corn season, but not during the wheat harvest, according to the investigations and observations. Investigations have also been made in the use of war gases to control certain birds, but the results have not been satisfactory.

#### Biological Surveys Continued.

Biological surveys have been continued in several States to show the actual conditions as to wild life, including the relations of birds and animals to agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry; and investigations have been conducted to furnish the basic information needed in connection with the constantly growing economic work, and for the proper administration of laws, including the migratory bird treaty act, and regulations affecting big game and bird refuges, and land fur animals in Alaska. More than 25,000 birds were

banded during the year in the study of migrations and the geographic distribution of the species.

In Alaska considerable effort has been expended in developing the reindeer industry, and studies have been made of caribou in the Territory. Protection is afforded land fur-bearing animals in Alaska through a warden service, and investigations have been made of fur farming there, principally fox raising.

Big game and bird refuges to the number of 68 are looked after by the Biological Survey. There are now about 1,500 buffalo, elk, deer, antelope, and mountain sheep on the five big-game preserves, besides the numerous wild fowl on these and on the 63 additional bird refuges maintained.

#### Wild Fowl Increases.

Enforcement of the migratory bird treaty act has had the helpful effect not only of increasing the supply of migratory wild fowl but of impressing observers generally with the importance of the law as a valuable conservation measure and of making friends for it out of its former bitter opponents. The main hope now seen for perpetuating our fine game birds for the enjoyment of posterity is in halting the rapid progress of drainage of the fresh-water marshes and lakes which are the natural feeding and breeding grounds of wild life, and may be more useful for such purposes than for agricultural uses. Through cooperation of the department several such water areas have been protected during the year, notably Swan Lake, in Minnesota, and the Winneshiek Bottoms, on the upper Mississippi River.

Permits issued for the entry of foreign wild birds and mammals into the United States have increased over former years but have not yet reached the pre-war record. Importations are inspected in order to insure the exclusion of wild forms which would be injurious in this country.